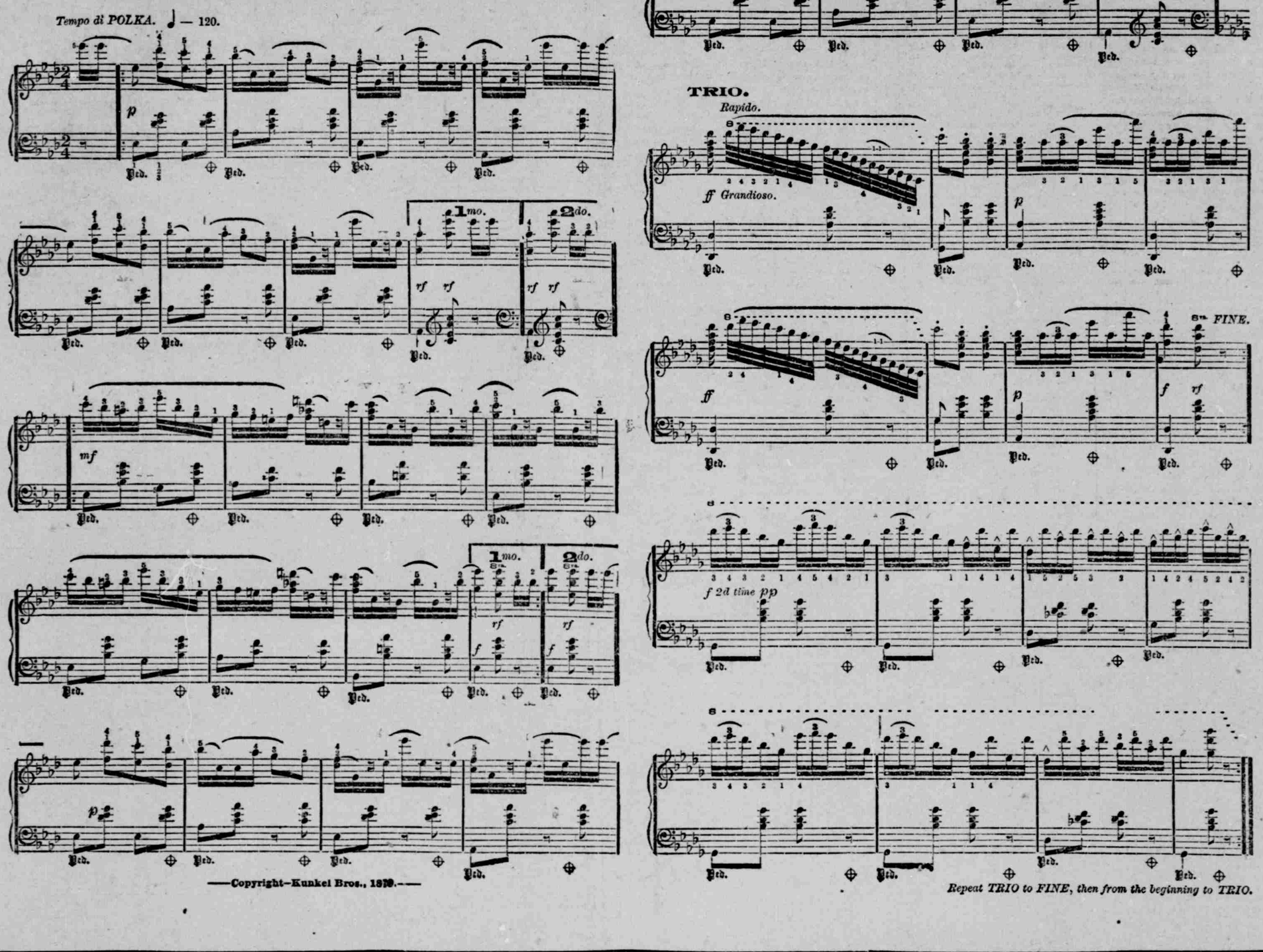
GREETING TO SPRING.

ALBERT LUTZ.



Printed by Special Arrangement—Copyrighted, 1888.

STEVE.

A West Virginia Tragedy.

BY EVA S. GRANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE RISE OF BEAR'S BRANCH," "THE OLD ROMANCE OF HORSE-SHOE BEND," ETC.

He was the swell figure of the neighborhood; a slim, handsome young fellow who dressed and walked like a gentleman.

But he was poor, utterly penniless, save for what he wore on his back.

He fell in love with Jean Wilcher when she was at school with him, and they talked it over every chance he had until she was fifteen. Then he began to think that he would require something else than genteel cheap clothes to marry on.

But before he had arrived at any definite plan of providing for her, or crowding her in with some of his relatives, which swarmed in the county like hornets, Jean had married the miller.

John Bunch was a great, rough fellow, just twice the age of his child-wife. He had made some money, inherited his uncle's mill, and he had built a wee cottage at the base of Pinchheart mountain.

It was Jean's mother who sent her to him with cow-hide stripes upon her dimpled shoulders because she vowed on her wedding day that she "loved Steve's little finger more than all of John Bunch's body and soul."

"She's young," said the scheming mother. "She'll outgrow all of thet trash."

But Jean had been in John's house a month, and yet she teased him with her preference for Steve.

He was very kind to her. She was well provided for. She had a horse to ride, and could run a bill at the village store, which she did to wonderful lengths, of calico and cotton lace.

Her mother a crook-nosed, green-eyed, yellow-faced hag smoked her pipe, and scolded her brood of younger ones in much satisfaction.

One day she strolled out through the wet fields in search of turkey nests. Purple ironweeds bloomed in the fence corners, and goldenrod and vivid spikes of sumach cast gleams at her from tangled love-vines as she poked among them for her turky hens.

She was a very contented woman.

She looked across the briery fields and saw the bedrabbled clouds hang slantwise over the Pinchheart knob and droop to the roof of Jean's neat cottage.

She saw the red top of the mill, with its fantastic weather-witch whirling in the mist. She saw the sway-backed horse, now Jean's, tramp through the lush-grass; she saw the black cattle that John would sell, and the hundred or so of Cotswold sheep browsing in the wet pastures.

The contortion of her loose jaws, that jerked her lips almost back to her ears, meant a smile of vast satisfaction.

Then she poked at a covey of partridges that buzzed up and whir-r-ed away, just as a white hand holding a pistol was thrust through the fence almost in her face. Two, three, five plump birds were headless when as many shots had left the "hair-trigger" of that revolver, and Mrs. Wilcher saw above the mossy top rail the face of Steve.

"What be yer a doin' thar, yer white-livered young hound!" screamed the woman.

"Practicin' with my revolver, ma'am, so's ter be true in my aim when I kem ter shoot yer an' the balance o' the folks wot's spilt my life," Steve replied.

"Yer better be home a shellin' ov yer yallar co'n an' helpin' yer daddy hoe his tu'nip patch," said Mrs. Wilcher, derisively.

"Steve laughed bitterly, and began to sing, and he really had a fine, clear voice:

"Oi've lately returned from the ocean,
Whar ther fire, blud an' balls are in motion;
Fer fightin' I niver tuk a notion,
It wad niver do fur Larry O'Brien.
Blud an' thunder tek the gal that wadn't marry,
wadn't marry, wadn't marry,
Blud an' thunder tak the gal that wadn't marry,
She'd never do for Larry O'Brien.

Almost before he had finished Mrs. Wilcher was striding out of sight toward her untidy house, and Steve skulking off with his dead birds.

He passed up the weedy road behind the mill, and he saw that Jean had company on her little box-like portico.

Mollie Jane Davis, a lean, loud-voiced girl, sat with Jean, helping to peel pears for pickles.

They saw melancholy Steve, and after a little flutter of excitement Mollie Jane invited him to assist them.

He hesitated. People always hesitate before swallowing the bitter-sweet.

He saw John cleaning out his mill-race with a scraper, saw him diligently flirting the tussocks and crawfish out in the mossy meadow.

Then he opened the gate, and went upon the porch.

Mollie Jane enjoyed the excitement of having these two together, but Jean looked heart-broken and Steve pale and wretched.

He managed to joke with them, to sing lively songs and withal to acquit himself with credit towards his lost love; but the visit had a strange effect upon him. He could not feel quite so heavy-hearted after that visit, and while he should have undoubtedly after a time forgotten all about Jean and the disappointment, now he would not try to forget it. He thought only of going to the cozy home and seeing her there. She was kind and John was hospitable.

But there came a time when he knew more of her marriage than he ever should have known, when he saw through thin blinds, John, made beastly by drink, beat her, actually beat pretty little Jean.

Then Steve's savagery came uppermost. He stepped in one stormy night, and knocking the maddened man on to the floor, he insanely begged the girl to run away with him.

"We'll go inter ther mountains, little Jean," he said, his fine face quivering with passion. "We'll run away from here, an' this brute 'ont ever find us, little Jean. We'll roam like ther fox, an' ther wild deer, an' free like 'em we'll nuvver know nothin' mo' of heartek nur sadnis."

John lay on the floor like one dead.

Jean's bare shoulders showed livid marks from his whip.

Steve pleaded with mouth and eyes and outstretched arms across her husband's form. But she stooped to take the bruised head into her lap.

"No, no," she said sadly. "I kin not, I kin not."

"O Lord, little Jean, you don't know wot love air. Kem on an' don't tek no more offen this brute."

"Hush, Steve, go 'way, an' don' talk thet way to me. I nuvver will run away from John. Nuvver, nuvver; no matter if he kills me. I air John's now fas' es heaben an' shore as world's above."

Steve turned then and left her, and took away with him the picture of a pale child with tumbled brown curls, crying, frightened over the shaggy, unkempt head of John Bunch. He sat down out on the roadway and watched the house. It was not long until John leaned from the little window, and Jean stood by fanning him.

After a while, against the inner light, he saw Jean taken into the arms of her husband.

Like silhouettes in blood, those lamp-lit faces gleamed out at him in midnight blackness of despair.

He sulked away to the shadow of the willow tree near the mill-race, and stood with his pistol in hand watching that house dimly outlined against the dusky Pinchheart.

Jean came to the door often, or the window, her sweet face uneasy, expectant.

Next day one of Steve's friends told him that John had only feigned unconsciousness, and had heard the last of Steve's pleading with Jean; so he had sworn out warrants and would come to arrest him.

"Go to jail fur him? Never wile my head's hot," he swore with frightful emphasis. "He air done runt me now, an' I'll tek nothin' mo' offen him. Not a haight mo'."

"But yer'd better keep outin' his way," said Steve's brother Jim. "I'll fight fur ye Steve, an' kill out ther cyounty ef need be, but ye best stur clar o' John Bunch fur a while."

Steve strode across the narrow cabin floor, strutting himself out to his fullest and bowing his arms like a katydid's as he swore by all the undug gold of Pinchheart that he would not budge a step.

"I haint done nothin'. Wot am I goin' to run fur!" he asked so fiercely that his white-haired grandmother in the corner removed her pipe from her gum-withered mouth to stare at him for his loud tone, for she was deaf as a dinner pot.

Then the old man hobbled in from the turnip patch and told them that the sheriff and John Bunch were coming through the bars.

For one moment Steve thought he would brave it out with his pistol.

"It air ther finest shot in all the state o' Craig," said he, "an' I bet my bottom dollar thet I kin clean out John Bunch's brain pan."

"But, Stevie," said halt old Dick, "yer don' want ter sile them snowy hands 'ith blood." He laid his own shaking fingers on the boy's arm. "We don' wan' no blood spilt in our do', an' so, my son, I summon ye ter run ter ther mountings."

And Steve went.

He slipped out the back door as tipsy John entered the yard.

For seven or eight weeks he skulked through the mountains, while the neighborhood ran riot with his name. Gossips old and gossips young abused him for everything.

Times grew so hot for him that he dared not show his face.

John Bunch swore he would shoot him on sight.

His father's house was guarded against his possible visits and Steve was utterly cast away.

The fall advanced.

Rains soaked and washed out all the autumn leaves into filemot browns; and the goldenrods hung in dripping, colorless rags from their spent stems.

Yellow corn nubbins were all used up in his reach, and the pawpaws sickened him.

By this time old Dick and Jim had grown tired of sneaking dodgers and bacon to him, and and many a night he lay upon wet leaves hungrier than the most improvident squirrel that ever gnawed a nut.

At last, he tired of hiding out and raised a flag of truce to the foes who guarded his father's cabin.

He sallied forth from the woods one clear day before Christmas, carrying a pole, with his tattered shirt flaunting from the top.

By that sign the two men, former friends and admirers of his swellship, lowered arms and signaled his approach.

He came forward and asked protection from John Bunch and mob vengeance, saying he would submit to arrest, trial and imprisonment.

"I know I kin prove myself innersent of intent ter hurt John, or ter spile his home," he added. "I kin prove that Jean Bunch axed me ter whip 'im. I'll stan' trial, but I'll put a flea in big John's ear thet 'ill mek him sorry he ever brung the law on me."

His words were taken to John as fast as he was to jail, and by the time Steve had stood his preliminary trial and got bail for $500, which his father and Jim agreed to pay, he received a bloody message from the frenzied miller.

He had sent Jean home and sworn he would shoot Steve so quick as he saw him, guilty or not, under arrest or not, bail or no bail.

"Yer'll hev ter leave this kentry," said Bill Dave Crowder, a long gawky, wrinkled faced agitator, who had dropped hoe and plow in his interest in Steve's case, though his large family sorely needed supplies. He kept paddling back and forth between those men, much in the light of the shovel of coals that is thrown between fighting bull-dogs.

"John ses yer'll hev ter light out now, an' never kum beck no mo'."

"But I 'ont do no sich thin'" said Steve. "I kin prove that Jean war ter blame, an' I air goin' ter do hit shore es guns! A gal kain't jilt a feller an' then set her husban' on him like a houn' on a sheep ter run him clean outin his own kentry ter eternity! No sirree, I tell yer!"

"Wall, yer bown ter feel John's pistil now," said Bill Dave, "an' it's pintedly foolhardy ter dar' sich a man es John air when he's drunk."

"How kin I go 'way!" asked Steve turning fiercely at his tormentor. "How kin I go when my old daddy an' my brother 'ud be broke up completely ef I did! Why, pap an' grandam 'ud go ter ther po' house an' Jim's fambly 'ud starve. For my bail 'ud clean out Ian', houses, steers an' hosses, an' leave him in debt till ther balance of his life. How kin a feller run! Let John kem on an' shoot. I kin shoot, too."

And so things stood. Jean at her mother's home, John Bunch grinding out his terrible wrath at the mill, Steve under bond to appear at a given time to stand trial for the charge of "assault and battery with intent to steal a wife."

But now he could at least walk certain walks at large, and the law backed him. But he dared not meet John Bunch, and he dared not leave the State.

It was a terrible, haunted, dog-sneaking life he led. No single night passed over his head without fits and starts on guard.

He took one comfort to his hardening heart, his revenge upon Mrs. Wilcher.

She had lost John Bunch, or seemed likely to; had broken Jean's spirit, and was blamed by all the county for her meanness of heart.

No single ray of hope pierced the gloom of Jean's despair.

She found herself—an unlettered child—held responsible for a grave quarrel between two fierce animals, who would reason like philosophers, and, failing to find cause for offense, would yet be enemies of the blood, would war to the knife. One of them was her husband, and in Jean's religion that was a reverent name.

Now, like a woman, she deemed it best that Steve should be run quite away. She did not believe he would stay to be killed, and so she meant to urge John on with his bloody threats Life was so much more miserable with her mother than it had been with kind-hearted, blustering John that she longed to return to the cottage on Pinchheart. She therefore went to the mill one wintry day with a hope of explaining away perplexities with John.

The mill-wheel was still. Grasses and brown weeds drooped over the slippery race. Ice-bound waters, still as a corpse, gleamed through the trestle-work and seemed listening to her throbbing heart.

Gray winter, like a brood'ng spirit, trailed over the naked willow sprouts and rested heavily on the brushy mountain.

Jean stood on the platform, hesitating to enter the mill. When she had last visited it, voices of the water-race had filled the hollow crevices like musical drippings in caves. Far down the stream in frozen shallows she saw a couple of neglected sheep stand. How dismal was the echo against the bleak Pinchheart of their lonesome bleating.

She looked across the meadow, now full of trackless snow, to the little brown cottage, and the red curtains glowed out at her like blood spots on her memory. No smoke issued from the chimney. She shivered when she thought of the cheerless hearth, and shivering she pushed open the lower half of the mill door and stepped in.

Away scudded half a dozen gray rats, only pausing to blaze at her from their beady eyes. She climbed the ladder-way and stood in the floury upper room.

John's dog arose from his shuck bed and came to meet her.

"Whar's yer marster, Pont?" she said tremulously, as she stroked his brown head.

The door to John's room stood open, and she went in. An unpainted desk sat against the wall, and her husband lay upon the tumbled bed in the corner. He had on his mill clothes, and the vinegary breath in the room told her that he was drunk.

She leaned against the desk, looking out of the floury, cob-webbed window, waiting for him to waken.

She was very pretty in her crimson shawl, folded about her brown curls like a Red-Ridinghood. The dog rubbed his stiff fur against her and day lengthened into the dusk of evening.

What she said to him and what answer he made does not matter. He walked home with her, at any rate, and he was sobered, white as a corpse, but determined as death, and his heart was on fire.

The next day court met.

Early in the morning one of the busy scurriers told Steve that John swore he should not stand a trial because of what he would say about Jean. He must leave the town or be shot to a dead certainty.

Steve then went to his lawyer.

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature," drawled the fat little attorney. "And you put a pistol in your pocket. If he attacks you, let loose."

Upon this advice Steve was persumed to act, but John should have been bound over to keep the peace.

The day advanced upon the two men, hoping yet fearing to come together.

The town was full of countrymen. All of Steve's relatives swarmed like ants in a colony. Many of them, clannish to the core, deemed it unjust in the nature of things, that John Bunch should have everything—money, home, wife and respect of the community, while poor swell Steve had none of these and was hunted like a dog besides.

They congregated in the jocky alleys, and byways throughout the village, and discussed matters. Steve was the only one of their race who looked and dressed like a gentleman. He was numbskullery they said, but as brave as a bull before red, kindhearted and genteel in manners. He walked the village streets that day, knowing that at every corner a friend stood armed to help him when the time came.

The time came soon.

John Bunch stood in the door of the little saloon, almost entirely tipsy. He had been "treated" by numerous men, some friends, some enemies.

Steve came out of the store opposite.

John's heavy heart gave a great stroke when he first caught sight of the slender form, the snowy collar, the flutter of red cravat over Steve's shoulder.

Like a vulture, he floundered drunkenly onto the pavement, and staggered blindly after him. He aimed the pistol at Steve's back, and gained on him.

"Look out, Stevie, look out," cried some street-watcher, and, without looking back, Steve ran.

Just a turn at the court-house fence would put him out of John's range, and save them both. Steve's heart, aching as it never ached before, urged him to escape without bloodshed; urged him to do John justice, to stand a trial, to pay the penalty, to spare Jean; even then, at the turn of the tide, his heart spoke up within him.

But some street dog, some monkey wanting the use of the cat's paw, howled lustily: "Kill him, kill him, Steve! turn thar, man, an' let inter him."

Steve wheeled round, and ran back, discharging his revolver into John at every step. A large stone was hurled at him, and he fell upon his knees in the dust. Steve emptied his last shot into his breast, and a frenzied countryman, one of the waiting friends, sprang upon poor wounded John, and cut his throat.

The excitement was terrible. Like fighting bloodhounds men howled and swore and trampled over each other. A blow here, a knife-thrust there; a bloody face and wounded side were dragged out of the mob.

When the peace-makers arrived and the men were separated it was found that John was not yet dead. Six bullet-wounds gaped from his body, one stone bruise, and the blood flowed from the gashed throat. Suffering in agony, he was moved into a neighboring house, and they told him he would die. He could not speak, but his groans were heart-rending.

Steve, at his barred prison window, could look down upon the doorway and see the friends surge in and out; could hear the every moan of anguish from John's bleeding throat. He was not a hardened criminal, and remorse wrung his very soul. He saw Jean go into the room, and her mother; and all of poor John's relations. He saw them come out weeping; he saw their grave faces, hopeless.

Some one told him that John made a will and that Jean was forgiven, and would get all his property.

After a space in which there was no day but a black, ghost-peopled lapse of time, he watched them bring the coffin out and bear it away.

Now came a slight revulsion of feeling in his anxiety to save his neck. He forgot remorse for a while!

Then came a long, tedious impaneling of a proper jury, and then the more agitating trial. Some points were terribly against him. John's pistol had been filled with beeswax balls, and his friends said some enemy had loaded it on the day of the shooting while John slept. At times it seemed as if Steve must go to the gallows.

But of the jurymen, three had been tried for murder, and the twelve managed to get him off with a fine of $75, for shooting on the street.

Then he was free.

He was honorably acquitted.

When he walked out of the jail, on the fresh spring day, he was a strange being. He looked curiously in the face of each man he met, and saw contempt for him. He was but twenty-two years old, but he felt himself to be seventy. His step was slow, indecisive, aimless. His hand was tremulous, his voice plaintive. Where had all of pride gone, where his self-conceit? He left the State within three days after his acquittal. But he could not stay away. The autumn found him again by his father's fire. He did not go to town often, and after a few weeks avoided meeting with old friends. He spent the days hunting, and often the nights in the mountains.

One night often see him skulk through the brush around the silent mill on Pinchheart, and note that at times he stood for hours in one position, still as a statue, as if in thought. Then he would hurry away looking over his shoulder, as if followed by some fearful shadow.

When the dark night came and every tree seemed an armstretched horror and every white cliff a ghost; when the winds moaned through the cuts like suffering spirits, and rains sobbed and wept from the starless sky, a night walker might have heard Steve shriek out on the mountains; shriek as he wandered, haunted.

And one day he came home barefooted, bareheaded, tattered, wild-eyed, ill.

"Whar hev ye bin!" asked old Dick, shambling away from the fire to make room for him.

"All over heaven, an' earth, an' hell," shrieked the boy. And all night long he raved, and laughed, and sang, and wept, and talked, and swore.

The doctor came. The neighbors crowded in, and at last they strapped poor maniac Steve to the bed, never to rise again.

Some one said Jean was among the neighbors who came, like birds of prey, to old Dick's cabin.

Just twenty-four hours after Steve came home from the woods the doctor said that he was dying.

(Just that long had John Bunch suffered with his wounds.)

Mrs. Wilcher came in, pipe in her mouth, and all of the friends who had urged him down the precipice of crime came and looked at Steve dying.

Old Dick stood at the head of the bed, the great tears rolling down his leathery cheeks, which he dried on his shirt-sleeve.

"Grandam," the pet name that Steve had given to the blind and deaf old gammer in the corner, rocked herself to and fro, crooning a solemn song:

"Hail ye sighin' sons o' sorrer.
Larn fum me yer sartin doom;
Larn fum me yer fate ter-morrow;
Death perhaps lies in yer tomb."

Steve sprang up wildly, breaking his ropes, and threw out his bony arms. His eyes were blood-shot, his throat swollen, his breast heaving with the billows of despair that beat within it.

"Stand back, John, stand back!" he cried, pushing frantically at a ghastly phantom before him, and with a gasp of agony he died.

Priestess of the Vine.

San Francisco Corespondence New York Tribune.

The methods by which Miss Kate Field proposes to carry on the work of spreading the gospel of the grape at the East, for which task she has been commissioned by the State Viticultural Association, in the direct interest of California wines, will be original, and, it is thought, effective. She will not, as is the general impression, deliver lectures, but will depend mainly on her social abilities and prestige. Her method will be to hold receptions at the homes of leading social lights in the principal eastern cities, and on these occasions she will discuss the question of wine-drinking in informal talks, taking grounds in its favor. Being a journalist, she will use the press, as far as possible, to spread her sentiments. The commission told Miss Field that it could not pay her adequately, but offered her $2,500 for her work up to next July, the end of the fiscal year.

TERRY AND THE VIGILANTES.

A Tale of Troublous Times Revived by a Recent Episode.

New York Press.

The recent attempted assault on Justice Field by Judge David S. Terry, the husband of the notorious Sarah Althea Hill, while the decision in the famous Sharon-Hill case was being read, has recalled to memory many of the incidents in the stormy times which make the history of the earlier days of California read like a romance. One incident in which Judge Terry figured prominently seems to have escaped notice, and as it is in direct keeping with the last outbreak of this belligerent gentleman it will be of especial interest.

Beginning in the year 1855 and continuing well into 1856 a period of lawlessness and crime flourished until it was not safe to appear on the streets of San Francisco. Masked men without fear of the law possessed the streets and robbery and outrages seemed to rule supreme. This condition of affairs went on until at last it culminated in the shooting of editor King of the Evening Bulletin by one Casey, who was an ex-convict of Sing Sing. King had referred to his career in an editorial, and Casey shot him. This outrage revived the vigilance committee, which had been organized as early as 1851, and they hanged Casey.

On June 3, 1856, San Francisco was put under military laws, and General William T. Sherman, then major in the regular army, was commissioned major general of the State militia. The vigilance committee was ordered to disband, which order they ignored, and proceeded to fortify their rooms. The sympathy of the better element was with them, notwithstanding Governor Johnson's proclamation. A shipment of arms was being secretly conveyed to Major Volney E. Howard, who succeeded General Sherman on account of a disagreement between the latter and the Governor. This shipment was under the charge of one Reuben Maloney.

The Vigilantes, getting wind of this, captured the arms, and on the next day—June 21, 1856—sent Mr. A. Hopkins, of the Vigilantes police, to bring Mr. Maloney to explain some things about the shipment. He found Maloney in the office of Dr. H. P. Ashe, United States naval agent, and Judge David S. Terry, who was then associate Justice of the Supreme Court, was also present. Upon stating his errand, Hopkins was informed that no arrest could be made in the presence of the last-named gentleman, and he retired to get assistance.

Terry and Ashe were both heavily armed, and they undertook to escort Maloney to the armory of the "Law and Order" troops on Dupont street, but were met by the Hopkins party. Hopkins, thinking from Terry's motions that mischief was meant, sprang upon him, and a desperate struggle ensued, in which Hopkins was seriously cut by a knife in Terry's hands. During the hubbub caused by this fight the three men made good their escape. Excitement reigned supreme. Hundreds of men surrounded the Dupont-street armory, and Terry and Maloney were demanded and given up. They were confined in a cell at the committee's rooms to await the result of Hopkins's injuries. Had they resulted fatally the episode of last Monday would never have occurred.

Terry had good friends, and through their intervention the Legislature of Texas, his former residence, petitioned Congress to interfere in his behalf. The judiciary committee, to whom the petition was referred, never reported on it. Hopkins, having recovered, Judge Terry was tried and liberated, after the examination of over 150 witnesses. The committee advised him to resign his judgeship. About two weeks later the vigilance committee disbanded, after having purged the city of the disorderly element.

His Mother's Doughnuts.

Springfield Union.

"Did you make these doughnuts, Mandy, dear?"

"Yes, darling. I hope you like them."

"Well, perhaps my taste has changed or my jaws have limbered up or something, but they ain't much like the doughnuts my mother used to make."

"Aren't they? And I tried so hard (tears) to make them nice."

"Nice! By George, Mandy, if my mother had made such splendid, puffy doughnuts as yours, I should have died in my early childhood, of an overloaded stomach. Thanks to the sagacity of the dear old woman, it took two hours and a half to wear out one of her doughnuts."

Mrs. Langtry's Divorce.

Paris Cable Special.

The friends of Mrs. Langtry will be delighted to hear that she is on the point of securing the long-sought divorce. It is well known that, owing to the opposition of her husband, Mrs. Langtry was unsuccessful in both her American petitions. Mr. Langtry's solicitor has been in Paris during the past week and has had several interviews with the Lily, and in return for certain concessions on her part, it is said that Mr. Langtry will not resist the next application, which is to be made at Newport. Mrs. Langtry left Paris this morning for England, in order to personally conclude the arrangements with her husband.